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C. A. B.*

The Fall:

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S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE WEST CHURCH,

Nov. 27, 1864,

THE SUNDAY AFTER THE DECEASE

OF

MRS. SARAH PUTNAM.

By C. A. BARTOL.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SON,

15, WATER STREET.

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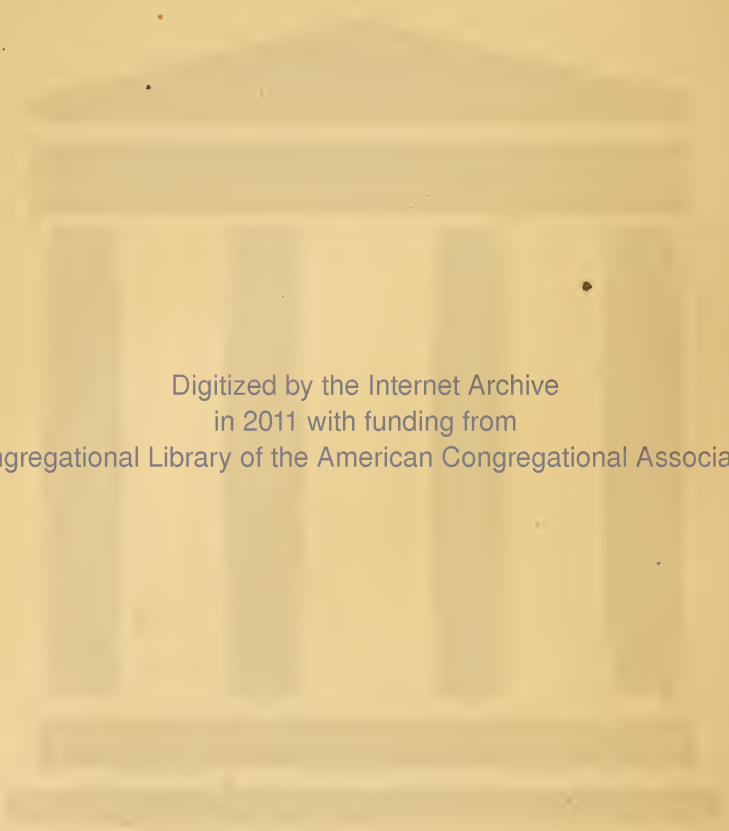
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S E R M O N.

“THE GRASS WITHERETH, THE FLOWER FADETH; BUT THE WORD OF OUR
GOD SHALL STAND FOR EVER.”—Isa. xl. 8.

It is fall,—so called because so much that has been attracting our eye is falling to the ground. The fruits fall, the flowers fall, the leaves fall. Their fall is our rise and riches in the product of the year. God, the silent partner in the firm, furnishes all the capital in our business with Nature.

What is the lesson from all this punctual produce of the year, but that our life should be productive? The farmer boasts not of the elegant tree, as of that which has given him the sweetest taste or the most bushels. So the main question with human creatures is of fruit; and the silent ripening of the harvest, on which hangs all life of man or beast, hints the superiority of quiet activity to busybody bluster and noise. The apples, and all their orchard-kindred, without profession or notice swelling on the boughs, should shame our pretensions and loud words. All through

August and into September, I got a speechless admonition from a vegetable prophet, like Jonah's gourd, that had crept across my path, and lay lowly on the ground, looking larger every time I passed.

All the fruits, rare and high or humble and common, teach us not only to yield unostentatious bounty, but the way to be prolific. Every grain draws its flavor from deep wells and mighty principles. It clings for support to the sun and sea. It breathes the boundless air. The wandering clouds have their mission to visit it. Furrowed and crumbled by storms and streams, the mountains enter into its substance; the granite rocks are beaten to powder and dissolved to atoms to mix with its expanding structure; and nothing in the universe so great but is represented in its little sphere. So, for all the fruit we bring to perfection, we depend beyond ourselves on spiritual elements. As the sapling is praised that comes soonest into bearing, and the veteran trunk lauded which ceases not to bear with old age, so is it with human youth and longevity.

Well have all great teachers, including Jesus, used this language, by which nature and conscience correspond. How patiently we wait, how eagerly we look, for fruit of the moral season among mankind! Justice to the wronged is fruit. Liberty to the oppressed is fruit. Victory for just national authority is fruit. Charity to the poor and destitute, help to the wounded

or weary soldier or sailor, care of the orphan, comfort for the prisoner, or occupation for the discharged convict, teaching any child, or training your own, — it is all fruit; and the kindness you grow in your home is finer than the luscious grapes in a sunny spot outside the windows. On every broad theatre, in every private enclosure, how white the fields of opportunity! Thanks to the young, unspeakable reverence of love to the elders, who have borne much fruit, at Christ's word, to glorify God!

But fruit is not the only thing with plants or human beings. Next, many after as some before the fruits, fall the flowers. Not without signification the latter as well as the former. Hung with their many-colored signals above fleshly appetite, not reaped or gathered into barns, touched by no sickle or scythe, never eaten, but spiritually enjoyed, what are the flowers but types of our nobler dispositions, while the fruits signify our deeds? As they come from God, and carry us to him, of what in him do the flowers tell but his gentleness? Himself unseen, he will hide none of his attributes. Had we only the earth and stars, hills and vales, Alpine passes, airy and watery depths, we should mark his power alone. In the universal bloom we note his tenderness too. While a blossom greets my eyes, I will trust no creed of my Maker's jealousy, vain-glory, or revenge. O gloomy theologian! you must uproot or burn away the flowers,

and exterminate their whole race, rose and lily, violet and daisy, before I will believe in your eternal torment, or you can find room to dig your bottomless pit! I will take these delicate painted forms as tokens of the Father's feelings. He that fosters these soft nurslings of the soil will, no sooner than his Son, break the bruised reed of human weakness and misfortune. I hear him say, as though it rang out a chime from their little bells, "Receive the flowers for my emblems of what I cannot otherwise, even by prophetic inspiration, teach you in words! Celebrate with them your joy; soothe with them your grief; send them for good company to the sick pillow and lonely chamber; adorn with them the wedding-festival and deck the funeral-bier; plant them by the grave, till your hopes flourish; and let their revival be a sign, that the human form, wilting on the hearse, has dropped a seed, — to spring again." Every garden on earth predicts the heavenly paradise. Therefore we enjoy our gardens so much.

The flowers are often spoken of as light and frail; but no weakness is in them, more than in the traits they symbolize. Notice their hardihood,—shall I call it fortitude? How they shame with their virtue our guilty impatience and discouragement! On your household plot, in the public square, with their affectionate charms, how they persevere deep into October cold and November cloud; some of them resisting

north-eastern tempests, north-western blasts and black frosts, to maintain their shape and hue, seemingly fragile as they are ! Looking out of my window at the white snowberries, or those of the mountain-ash, ruddy and aloft, I think how nature, in every vital though slender form, contrives to hold out. Wherefore, while the stones crumble under the long-dropping rain, does her nicer organization persist, but to intimate that the refined and soaring inclinations we cherish will withstand the various rebuffs and calamities of life ? In human character, what but the utmost kindness is the invariable pledge of surpassing strength ?

Lastly fall the leaves, with strange splendor to make their sickness and decay more attractive than the vernal hues. What mean these brilliant tints they die with, but to say, "This is not the end ! We wave our crimson banners in the breeze, our yellow standards we unfurl, for assurance we shall come again." Human life is a leaf. The leaf exists but to be a type of it ; and as the leaf, in vanishing so brightly, with exceeding lustre of hope, expects its own return, so by the moral beauty of human dying is a personal ascension foretold from the dust.

The fall, then, of the year, and all things that fall with it, have no design but to point to those which fall not ; as indicated by that word of God which is truth among men, and shall never fall, but has in it

the quality of enduring for ever, though "Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven." As the green bay-tree is quickly gone, and the fig casteth her untimely leaf, as the usurping angels were but falling stars, so shall the wicked fail. "You and I and all of us" shall not "fall down, and bloody treason flourish over us." Our country, espousing right, shall not fall. Every martyr's grave is a spot of her resurrection. It matters not if she be impoverished now. Not to a rich but a poor man Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" and reduced nations shall re-appear as from the dead, if the vitality of equity and honor be not lost. Though staggering with debt, prostrate with sacrifice, buried in heaps of the slain, we shall rise again.

But the chief suggestion of our theme is, that the human soul falls not; but shall arise for ever. It is not a thing to put a shroud on, or build a monument over. For illustrations of its nature, as fingers of its destiny, are all the glories of the creation in which it lives; and for its sake I bring every thought or figure. It is the only reality; for it is God himself in the human bosom; and the fact, that the conscious being in each one of us is his offspring, makes the only warrant of our eternal heritage.

Sad yet blessed occasion, my friends, is with us to restate the ground we rest on; for the spirit ascended, last week, of one of our sisters, the oldest person,

with a single exception, ever in my pastoral charge ; whose case so bespeaks the grandeur of the divine purpose in our common fate, that I depart from my habit, to cite it for your instruction. She was the surviving partner of the eminent Samuel Putnam, judge on the Supreme Bench, whose hoary head, with its benignant look, many of you may remember, as I seem to see it now, an ornament in the sanctuary and by the way. Born in Salem, SARAH GOOLL, November 28, 1772, and dying in Boston, November 22, 1864, within six days of being ninety-two years of age, she was nearly four years older than the nation, with her intelligent activity, which must have begun in her fourth year, spanning the whole period from its birth to the point of its being with a grander declaration born again. George Washington, of whom some romancer has said that he did not smile during the Revolutionary war, she saw in an assembly-room in Salem, and danced in the same set with him. Not forgetting extraordinary instances of constitutional vigor into extreme longevity, hers is the most remarkable. She had no second childhood of incompetency, as she never left her first, of innocency. The flesh was fair and soft in her face, as she approached toward five-score, as in the first season of the infant. She never felt old, as she never looked old ; never lost that mental or spiritual strength, in whose decline age is commonly thought to consist. She was thoroughly taught

by self-culture and the training by events of native wit, six weeks in her childhood being the measure of all the schooling of her life. Her superior faculties as well as her tender feelings unfolded to the last, contradicting the unbelieving opinion, that mind and body wane as they wax together. Her hearing was perfect, her sight keen to thread the finest needle. A union almost without precedent, in the very fibre of her being, of traits both robust and sensitive, can alone account for a vitality so peculiar. The parent-stock lived, conscious in her, throughout all the family branching of numerous descendants, to babes of the third and fourth generation. Well may her children rise up and call her blessed, in a filial reverence which those related to her by marriage share with those whom she bore into the world.

Her passing from us, after slight infirmity and illness, was such as we might fancy would always, with healthy and sinless nature, be the way. It was indistinguishable from sleep, and apparently without a struggle or a pang; as with one of whom it was said he died of no distemper, but, the weights running down in the clock, the hands stood still. Fruit, flower, or leaf in autumn never more quietly dropped its hold. The silver cord was loosed; but not the golden bowl, the pitcher at the fountain, or the wheel at the cistern, broken. Nothing was broken with her. She went with imperceptible gradations from the mortal into

the eternal state. As I looked on the relics, so beautiful in death, of what had been so noble in life, and saw the meaning of her heart and mind unfaded, — if possible more significant in the powerful and delicate brow and face, as the sun casts back its most exquisite light after he has gone down, — it seemed to me the fairest and grandest picture of mortality. The blossoming wreaths in which it was encircled charmed the eye less than the fairer human flower withering more slowly. Rarely in any features have been traced of love and intellect lines so strong, which death seemed to etch more nicely and set deeper, as in token of greater life. As the autumn passed away, how ripe she was gathered! As the annual thanksgiving drew nigh, she rose to spend hers in heaven.

In this slight sketch, I know not whether to note first her understanding or her affections, such was their co-equal force. Well might she be fond of children, and they of her, who identified age with youth, and took away all distinction. Happy were educated men and cultivated women in conversation with one whose miraculous memory, so unlike that of almost all advanced persons, did not drop recent any more than remote incidents from its firm and level line, on which, through a career so long, was suspended so much. How delightful to all, the daily spectacle of her interest, so unflagging, in human life, in society, in the fortunes of the country, which, in

her longer term of existence, she might have deemed a sort of ward in her care! She looked soberly on the solemn things now transpiring; but it would be wrong not to emphasize the cheerfulness she mixed with her solicitude. The lamp of hope did not, as with some, through any decrepit desponding, go out in her. In the cause of freedom, order, and humanity, she put her faith, even as her trust was, in God.

The culture of her mind was never remitted; but she was a learner to the end. She took great pleasure in reading books of history, biography, and poetry, or in listening, through large volumes, to what others' voices might convey; and would be so absorbed that no entrance of noise or bustle of interruption would avail to divert her attention from the pages; or, with the stroke characteristic of alert and vivacious abilities, she would run through a story, rapidly reaping or gleaning, by the edge of her thought, whatever to be digested it might contain.

She had a rare industry with her hands, moreover; as a young girl, continuing her busy-fingered task during the calls of visitors, and keeping up the custom through fourscore years of that maidenly toil; having done helpful work for no less than five generations of persons. However straitened in the range over the threshold of her walk, her assiduity did not fail. She wrought in the nicest patterns of sewing and silk embroidery, not for occupation simply to pass

the time, but benevolent ends; and sent admired specimens, from which large sums were realized, to the Sanitary Commission, and Sailors' Fairs. One little cushion, whose owner I envy, came from her to that which was recently held by this church, and which secured seventeen hundred dollars in a day, for the Children's Mission to the Children of the Destitute. Truly this mother of us all, so diligent in duty, answered the prediction concerning the righteous, and brought forth fruit in old age. In the fall of the year, gently loosened from the tree of earthly life, even her mortality, as it fell and lay low, was, more than younger forms, winning to look upon:—

“No spring nor summer's beauty hath such grace
As I have seen in one autumnal face.”

Even this spontaneous tribute, running in unpremeditated method from the heart, would be incomplete, if I did not add, that in her manners was the singular charm which comes from the combination with unvarnished simplicity of perfect courtesy; the latter quality proceeding from her kindness, as the former from her truth. Her aspect beamed ever with kindly sensibility,—

“Her eyes let out more light than they took in:
They told not when, but did the day begin;”

and the style of a humane and godly sincerity was so printed in the very clay that had ceased to be her

body, it seemed a pity to consign it to the grave, but that we could follow the spirit into the celestial frame among the angels of wisdom and love. For I count such human behavior not so much a prophecy as an example of the immortality of the soul.

